

The Rise and Fall of a Coalition:  
The Supreme War Council and Marshal Foch, 1917-1919

A Monograph

by

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## Abstract

The Rise and Fall of a Coalition: The Supreme War Council and Marshal Foch, 1917-1919, by MAJ Joseph DiDomenico, US Army, 49 pages.

1917 was a period of crisis for the Anglo-French Coalition. A social revolution forced Russia to withdraw from the Great War, the French Army was consumed by mutinies, and operations throughout France and Italy remained disjointed and unable to break the stalemate at the front. To resolve the issue, British Prime Minister David Lloyd George established the Supreme War Council to develop a unified strategy for the Coalition and end the war with Germany. Many historians argue that the Supreme War Council failed to provide the effective command structure needed by the coalition. The premise of this paper, however, is that the Supreme War Council did not fail in developing unified command, rather that it enabled development of a theater strategic approach.

Members of the Supreme War Council wanted to provide strategy, but the council became overwhelmed with issues concerning shipping, material, and resources. Unable to provide the necessary strategic direction, a German Offensive in March 1918 brought further calamity. As a result, the council appointed Ferdinand Foch as the Supreme Allied Commander charging him with command and formulation of theater strategy in France and Italy. Foch halted the German offensive, and the Supreme War council focused on prioritizing and coordinating resources needed by the operational artists to regain the initiative. Framing and resourcing these problems enabled Foch to orchestrate an effective a coalition counter-offensive that brought Germany to the negotiating table.

When pre-armistice negotiations began in 1918, political influence and national interests began to take priority over coalition strategic objectives. Following the signing of the armistice and the occupation of the Rhineland, immense political influence and diverging national interests degraded the coalition. By 1923 deteriorating Franco-German relations caused by harsh reparations brought about the American premature withdrawal from the Rhineland.

The interplay between the Supreme War Council, Ferdinand Foch, and his operational level commanders provides relevance to the current force. It explains how the principles of mission command and multinational operations in Joint, Army, and NATO doctrine, if not appropriately addressed in planning, can fracture a coalition. It also expresses the dangers and complexity of political and domestic influence on military strategy within a coalition and measures that can exacerbate the long-term success of a multinational organization.

## Contents

Acknowledgment.....	v
Acronyms .....	vi
Figures.....	vii
Introduction .....	1
Literature Review.....	4
Section 1: A Coalition Without a Strategy .....	8
The Supreme War Council.....	11
The Amalgamation and Logistics Problem.....	13
The Organization and Command Problem.....	15
Section 2: Unified Command and Theater Strategy .....	18
The Generalissimo .....	19
Balancing Interests of the Coalition.....	21
Developing Theater Strategy and Seizing the Initiative .....	25
Intervention in Russia and Macedonia.....	27
The Coalition on the Offensive.....	30
Section 3: The Armistice and Political Influence.....	34
The Armistice and Diverging National Interests .....	35
The Occupation.....	38
The Future of the Coalition.....	41
Conclusion.....	42
Bibliography .....	47

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From the US Army School of Advanced Military Studies, Dr. Thomas Bruscino who provided the direction that helped me to understand and argue history in a manner that it might enlighten Operational Artists of the future. I am grateful for your passion of history, and the knowledge that brought forth to help me blend theory and doctrine into the unique historical perspective of this topic.

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## Acronyms

ADRP	Army Doctrinal Reference Publication
AEF	American Expeditionary Force
AJD	Allied Joint Doctrine
AMTC	Allied Maritime Transportation Council
BEF	British Expeditionary Force
CIGS	Chief of the Imperial General Staff
COPD	Comprehensive Operations Planning Directive
DA	Department of the Army
DOD	Department of Defense
FM	Field Manual
GHQ	General Headquarters
IAAC	Inter-Allied Armistice Commission
IAHC	Inter-Allied High Commission
IARC	Inter-Allied Rhineland Commission
JP	Joint Publication
MOD	Ministry of Defense
NARA	National Archives and Records Administration
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PM	Prime Minister
RG	Record Group
SWC	Supreme War Council

## Figures

1	The Supreme War Council: Organization and relationships from 1917 to 1918.....	15
2	Ludendorff's Spring Offensives: March – July 1918 .....	24
3	Foch's Counter-Offensive: September – November 1918.....	34



## Introduction

Napoleon was not a great general. He only fought a Coalition.

—David Lloyd George, War Memoirs, attributed to French General M.P.E. Sarraill

The concept of fighting wars as coalitions is as old as humanity. Consider Thucydides, who in four hundred BC published his history of the Athenian and Spartan struggles throughout the Peloponnesian War. Machiavelli, who wrote *Politicorum libri sex* during the Italian wars where a league of Kingdoms and Duchies struggled to ward off French aggression.<sup>1</sup> Three hundred years later, Carl von Clausewitz published his theory of war after Europe came together to stop the expansion of Napoleon's empire. The experiences of Clausewitz, much like those of Thucydides and Machiavelli, were influenced by successes and failures of coalitions and the political conditions that surrounded them.<sup>2</sup> Embedded within each of their writings is the visible link to politics and war. The importance of maintaining an inter-state partnership is inherent in each of their writings, recognizing that political influence can be either a source of strength or a critical vulnerability for a coalition.

Nearly a century after the Seventh Coalition defeated Napoleon at Waterloo, a new war of coalitions was on the horizon. Preceded by a boom in technology and the industrialization of national economies, new military capabilities developed that history had never seen making global logistics and strategic coordination even more important to coalition warfighting. In late 1914, a Balkan conflict combined with a series of political agreements soon expanded the quarrel into a global war between the French-British-Russian Entente and the German-Austro-Hungarian

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<sup>1</sup> Azar Gat, *A History of Military Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 9.

<sup>2</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, eds. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 605, 725-726.

Alliance. After three years of war, Russia succumbed to social revolution leaving France, Britain, and Belgium hemorrhaging forces and money along the western front. Growing disunity among national leaders and a society frustrated with great losses was weakening the coalition to the point of crisis. It is here that the First World War provides a unique example to analyze the strategies and challenges of a coalition.

The Bolshevik Revolution removed Russia, an important member of the coalition, from the war. Leaders of the nations within the coalition knew large formations of German and Austro-Hungarian troops previously occupied in the fight against Russia would soon be transferred west to break the stalemate in France. No governing body of authority controlled actions of the Allied coalition. Various national armies were assigned a portion of a front or theater and given guidance by their political leaders.<sup>3</sup> By 1917, David Lloyd George, the wartime Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, was frustrated with a lack of unity among the forces in France. He knew that shared Allied efforts against the looming German offensive were necessary for coalition survival. As such, he established the Supreme War Council to synchronize the war effort of all the nations involved.<sup>4</sup>

Lloyd George believed that the council would generate inter-allied strategy and “watch over the conduct of the war.”<sup>5</sup> It evolved into the organization that produced an understanding of the problems that faced the Allies. Although the council was in a position to direct military matters, those efforts initiated by some leaders often spoiled discussions of theater strategy. They

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<sup>3</sup> J. H. Johnston, *Stalemate: The Great Trench Warfare Battles of 1915-1917* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1995), 17.

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Greenhalgh, *Victory Through Coalition: Britain and France During the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 169.

<sup>5</sup> World Peace Foundation, “The Supreme War Council,” in *A League of Nations* 1, no. 7 (October 1918), 366.

led to arguments regarding recruitment numbers, shipping resources, and intelligence reports on the German army. The appointment of French General Ferdinand Foch as the Generalissimo of Allied Forces addressed command issues of the coalition. The council then guided theater options available to Foch by managing the allocation of shipping and movement of American troops. They also considered other strategic options and incorporated resources available with the entry of the United States into the war effort.<sup>6</sup>

This monograph will explore the conditions surrounding the establishment of the Supreme War Council and discuss how it evolved into an organization that framed strategic problems and assembled elements of national power to support a theater strategy. It is the author's contention that although the Supreme War Council was established to arrange *operational* efforts of the allied forces, it was unable to accomplish this. Instead, the council focused on resolving strategic concerns of the coalition. The appointment of Generalissimo Ferdinand Foch was the pivotal point at which the coalition was able to operate under the principles of mission command. He developed strategies from the resources made available and problems laid out by the Supreme War Council. Foch and his staff developed an understanding of what was broadly possible for the coalition to accomplish through the discourse of the Council. He then developed a theater strategy that enabled operational artists, who were the commanders of each national army, to arrange tactical actions under a unified command structure.

As the war came to a close, the political nature of the Armistice and transition to a force of occupation altered the focus of the council and military commanders. National policies became more important to different nations than the coalition's strategic aim. Placing national interest over that of the whole coalition increased international tensions within each occupation zone and led to an early withdrawal of forces. The coalition Lloyd George strengthened began to break

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<sup>6</sup> David Trask, *The AEF and Coalition Warmaking, 1917-1918* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 30.

apart, and by 1923 the premature withdrawal of American troops from the Rhineland symbolized the beginning of the end of the partnership.

## Literature Review

The First World War is one of the most highly documented events in European military history. Many annotated bibliographies exist that document sources from personal accounts, to official records, and special holdings at different National Archives. While there are an impressive number of sources, interest in American involvement, and therefore the formation of an energized coalition under a unified command, peaked particularly around 1993 with the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of its offensive action in Cantigny. This included many of the secondary sources used in this monograph.<sup>7</sup>

Published materials in the two decades following the end of the war are the most valuable sources. They form the basis for understanding what occurred and how relationships played a role in the coalition structure. The memoirs of David Lloyd George, Ferdinand Foch, Tasker Bliss, and Edward House are the primary sources that explain the establishment of and command perceptions of the Supreme War Council.<sup>8</sup> Memoirs, of John Pershing, Philippe Petain, and Douglas Haig describe operational considerations that illuminate biases and personality conflicts among operational and strategic leaders.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> David Woodward, *America and World War I: A Selected Annotated Bibliography of English-Language Sources* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> Ferdinand Foch, *The Memoirs of Marshal Foch*, trans. T. Bentley Mott (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1931); Frederick Palmer, *Bliss Peacemaker: The Life and Letters of General Tasker H. Bliss* (New York: Dodd, Mead, & Co., 1934); Charles Seymour, *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1928).

<sup>9</sup> John Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War* (New York: Frederick Stokes Company, 1931); Stephen Ryan, *Petain the Soldier* (New York: A.S. Barnes Co., 1969).

Other memoirs such as those of Generals Robert Bullard, Hunter Liggett, Henry Allen, and Fox Conner are sources that offer both a tactical and command perspective. They describe the employment and integration of American Division, Corps, and Army level forces with their coalition partners through the occupation. Fox Conner, like many other officers, published an article in the *Cavalry Journal* reflecting on the challenges of fighting as a coalition. These sources help to identify concerns of American Commanders, and also the actions that triggered changes in how British, French, or American troops felt about their colleagues.<sup>10</sup>

Other valuable first-hand accounts are those of staff officers that interacted with the Supreme War Council. Frederick Palmer, a war correspondent and well-published author on the Great War, wrote *Bliss: Peacemaker* on the life of General Tasker Bliss, the American representative at the Supreme War Council. The memoirs of George Marshall, Lieutenant Colonel Pierpont Stackpole, the aide to General Hunter Liggett, and Colonel U. S. Grant explain the implications of coalition warfighting from a staff perspective. These officers composed elements of the American headquarters that took part in coalition planning and saw the effects of good and bad inter-allied coordination. Each of them provides examples of operational misunderstandings and successes that affected the inter-allied tension at lower levels.<sup>11</sup>

After the Second World War broke out in 1939, writings on the Great War slowed until its fiftieth anniversary in the 1960s. Despite this, veterans and professionals published some

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<sup>10</sup> Hunter Liggett, *Commanding an American Army* (New York: Houghton & Mifflin Co., 1925); Robert Blake, ed. *The Private Papers of Douglas Haig: 1914-1919* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1952); Robert L. Bullard, *Personalities & Reminiscences of the War* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1925).

<sup>11</sup> Pierpont L. Stackpole, *In the Company of Generals: The World War I Diary of Pierpont L. Stackpole* Robert H. Ferrell, ed. (New York: University of Missouri Press, 2009); U.S. Grant, "Americas Part in the Supreme War Council during the World War," in *Records of the Columbia Historical Society*, Volume 29 (Washington, DC: Historical Society of Washington DC, 1928), 295-340; George Marshall, *Memoirs of My Services in the World War 1917-1918* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1976).

relevant articles on fighting as a multi-national coalition. General Sir Frederick Maurice, a British Commander relieved for speaking against Prime Minister Lloyd George, published an influential article in *Foreign Affairs* in 1943 titled, “Unity of Policy Among Allies” covering the importance of political and military interactions to forge a unified coalition.<sup>12</sup> Maurice published his article when coalition cooperation on multiple fronts became a central part of the Second World War conflict. It illustrated how unified policies as a coalition from the First World War served a reminder for strategists and operational artists of the Second World War. Maurice provided recommendations for the coalition that remain valuable for modern multi-national operations.

Between 1963 and 1975 the multinational aspect of the First World War grew in popularity. The authors of this period are the first that offer a broad analysis of the Great War. David Trask, Correlli Barnett, Donald Smythe, and Keith Nelson laid the foundation for many future works.<sup>13</sup> Each of them wrote important pieces published that synthesized problems at the operational and strategic levels of command. They depict critical linkages between policy and strategy between different national armies. Recognizing changes in policy, strategy, and organization over time they helped to explain the complex approaches commanders and politicians used to coalesce the coalition.

Other authors focused on doctrinal subjects and helped to bridge the implications of policy to the organizational capabilities. Authors like James Rainey, Timothy Nenninger, and

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<sup>12</sup> Frederick Maurice, “Unity of Policy Among Allies,” *Foreign Affairs* 21, no. 2 (January 1943), 322-330.

<sup>13</sup> Correlli Barnett, *The Swordbearers: Supreme Command in the First World War* (London: Cassell Military, 1963); Donald Smythe, *Pershing: General of the Armies* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986); Donald Smythe, “Your Authority in France Will Be Supreme: The Baker-Pershing Relationship in World War I,” *Parameters* 9, no. 3 (September 1979), 38-45; David Trask, *The United States in the Supreme War Council: American War Aims and Inter-Allied Strategy, 1917-1918* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978); Keith L. Nelson, *Victors Divided: American and the Allies in Germany: 1918-1923* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1975).

James Agnew looked at the foundations of tactical and operational doctrine and how dysfunction changed over the course of the war for the AEF.<sup>14</sup> Using mostly primary sources and declassified records, they developed a doctrinal analysis of American and Coalition operations in the war and explained the origins of organizational change. They provided evidence of a growing awareness of differences to meet tactical and operational objectives that would support coalition forces.

By 1993 other essential authors like Jehuda Wallach, James Cooke, Margaret MacMillan, Priscilla Roberts, and John Mosier published works with analysis of national and theater level strategy of the coalition.<sup>15</sup> These historians challenged many preconceived notions about how the relationships developed and nations fought under a unified command. They used political and strategic analysis of the war to explain a new view of how the coalition evolved. Elizabeth Greenhalgh and David Woodward are other notable authors with important works published between 2006 and 2014.<sup>16</sup> Each of them provided a detailed study of American, French, and Coalition operations. Well documented, these publications discussed the organization,

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<sup>14</sup> James W. Rainey, "Ambivalent Warfare: The Tactical Doctrine of the AEF in World War I," *Parameters* 13, no. 3 (September 1983), 34-46; Timothy K. Nenninger, "Tactical Dysfunction in the AEF, 1917-1918," *Military Affairs* 51, no. 4 (October 1987), 177-181; James B. Agnew, "Coalition Warfare: A Successful Experiment in Combined Command, 1914-1918," *Parameters* 1 (Spring 1971), 50-64.

<sup>15</sup> Jehuda L. Wallach, *Uneasy Coalition: The Entente Experience in World War I* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993); James J. Cooke, *Pershing and his Generals: Command and Staff in the AEF* (Westport, CT: Praeger, Inc., 1997); Margaret Olwen Macmillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2002); John Mosier, *The Myth of the Great War: New Military History of World War I* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2001); Priscilla Roberts, "Tasker H. Bliss and the Evolution of Allied Unified Command, 1918: A Note on Old Battles Revisited," *The Journal of Military History* 65, no. 3 (July 2001), 671-695.

<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Greenhalgh, *Victory Through Coalition: Britain and France During the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Elizabeth Greenhalgh, *Foch in Command: The Forging of a First World War General* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Elizabeth Greenhalgh, *The French Army and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); David R. Woodward, *The American Army and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

employment, and the pressures placed on the American and British Expeditionary Forces, the French General Headquarters, and the Supreme War Council between 1917 and 1923.

Patrick Cohrs and Margaret Pawley published two comprehensive histories of the occupation of the Rhineland through the 1920s. The transition to occupation they described allowed the return of separate national policy aims within the coalition. Explaining the shift of the Supreme War Council, they point out tensions that developed and spoiled the effectiveness of the coalition. An increasing lack of trust among commanders combined with diverging political policies and social concerns brought an early withdrawal from the Rhineland and concerns that would last through the inter-war period.<sup>17</sup>

Many of these authors focus on the mechanics of developing unified command for the coalition, and the Supreme War Council's failure to provide it. This monograph, however, will discuss how problems encountered by the coalition were resolved by the council. In addressing these obstacles, they enabled General Foch have the resources needed to develop a strategic approach. The Council did more than simply create a unified command structure by appointing General Foch, the political and military members of the Council framed logistical and constraints and prioritized planning efforts. As the conflict came to a close, different national political and domestic problems turned the focus of military and political leaders away from the occupation and exacerbated intra-national tensions leading to the fracture of the coalition in 1923.

## Section 1: A Coalition Without a Strategy

In the initial years of the Great War, the Triple Entente, a formal alliance between France, Britain, and Russia, grew into a loose coalition that, by 1915, included Belgium, Serbia,

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<sup>17</sup> Patrick C. Cohrs, *The Unfinished Peace After World War I: American Britain, and the Stabilisation of Europe* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006), James E. Edmonds, ed., *The Occupation of the Rhineland: 1919-1929* (London: Imperial War Museum, 1987); Margaret Pawley, *The Watch on the Rhine: The Military Occupation of the Rhineland* (New York: I.B. Taurus, 2007).



Montenegro, and Italy. At the outset of the war, it was evident the western front extending from the coast of Belgium to Italy became the decisive theater. The significant challenge was aligning military efforts between Belgian, British, French, and Italian armies considering each nation had different political objectives. The French priorities were to protect the line in France, the Belgians to remain in the fight for their homeland, the Italians, to fend off Austrian aggression, and the British, to avoid the stalemated trenches that depleted their small force. Fighting on the front failed to bring military results since 1914. In 1915, a strategy of attrition, developed by General Joseph Joffre, was considered a solution that would deplete Germans resources while they fought on two fronts.<sup>18</sup> By 1916, the strategy failed to bring the Germans to the negotiating table and by autumn of 1917, French, British, and Belgian forces along the western front were exhausted. Joffre was subsequently relieved and replaced by Robert Nivelle in December 1916.

In early 1917, the allies searched for other options to end the stalemate that was exacerbated by shortages in manpower. To make matters worse the Bolshevik Revolution broke out and mutinies erupted across the French Army the same year. These were indications of a failing strategy. With the loss of Russia, the Germans could transition forces from the Eastern to the Western Front. It increased the possibility to launch a strong offensive before the Americans could mobilize and come to the aid of the coalition. Social unrest pressured politicians to avoid attrition and different national priorities began to shift the focus of commanders at the front. The result of this pressure was poorly coordinated operations by the separate national armies.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> William Philpot, *War of Attrition: Fighting the First World War* (New York: The Overlook Press, 2014), 137-138; J. H. Johnson, *Stalemate! The Great Trench Warfare Battles of 1915-1917* (New York: Streling Publishing, 1995), 88-89; Roger Chickering and Stig Forster, eds., *Great War, Total War: Combat and Mobilization on the Western Front 1914-1918* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 312.

<sup>19</sup> Chickering, *Great War, Total War*, 314; Robert Doughty, *Pyrrhic Victory: French Strategy and Operations in the Great War* (London: Belknap Press, 2005), 310; Wallach, *The Uneasy Coalition*, 22-24.

The new British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, a conservative appointed in late 1916, promised to bring change by looking for new ways to coordinate coalition efforts. What was needed on the Western Front was a clear theater strategy and a level of command to develop unity under a single strategy. The entrance of the United States into the war on April 2, 1917 brought resources and energy to sustain the coalition and the potential for success, but a lack of coordination still challenged the allies.

After French Commander Philippe Petain recognized the poor condition of his troops and took steps to slow his operational tempo and restore order by easing the conditions of service for his soldiers.<sup>20</sup> British Commander, Douglas Haig, planned for a British offensive in Flanders to seize German submarine bases that disrupted vital shipping lanes and relieve economic pressure from Britain. Other leaders in the alliance thought incursions should focus on more important matters.<sup>21</sup> The French wanted the British to extend their lines south and relieve pressure on the deteriorating French armies. Others suggested the coalition consider an offensive where the Italian army recently had success near the Isonzo River. Italian General Luigi Cadorna, however, demanded more resources to be successful in the rugged terrain of the Isonzo. His troops, although initially successful, their morale was waning making an effective attack less likely.

The armies arrayed along the western front needed a theater strategy to prevent the conflicting national demands. By late 1917 the French and Italians required an operational pause but British forces were prepared to resume a limited offensive. None of them, however, were willing to accommodate and support one another because of political pressure. It was clear that social anxiety was influencing politics and breaking down any semblance of unity among allies.

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<sup>20</sup> Doughty, *Pyrrhic Victory*, 364-365; Stephen Ryan, *Petain the Soldier* (London: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1969), 124-126, 133.

<sup>21</sup> Doughty, *Pyrrhic Victory*, 376-377; Blake, *The Private Papers of Douglas Haig*, 228.

Each separate national army no longer had the resources to be effective against the increasing strength of German forces.

The only solution was to create a system with the international representation that provided common military strategy. The French proposed that placing a single commander in charge of forces in the west would achieve this, they call this supreme commander a Generalissimo. A Generalissimo, they suggested, provided an authority figure that gave operational level commanders of the national armies' direction and avoided unnecessary objections.<sup>22</sup> Lloyd George was also interested in an agency that could guide the war effort and received input from all the national leaders involved.<sup>23</sup> By now, the allies recognized that multiple operational efforts made it difficult to achieve the decisive victory over the Central Powers.

## The Supreme War Council

The national armies had assigned sections of the front where they operated independently. Each force with separate staffs and headquarters managed their own logistics, intelligence, and manpower, leading to a narrow understanding of the front. Politicians compounded this issue giving them objectives aligned to their specific political goals. In 1917, a single coalition was not fighting the Germans, independent national armies were. Lloyd George believed forming an international war council would unify the disjointed allied operations and allow them to a strategic aim as a coalition. He explained that "Our strength, as far as our own forces are concerned, is being sapped by the enemy in indecisive attacks which attain inadequate results... If such [strategic rather than tactical] results can ever become possible, they can only be

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<sup>22</sup> Barnett, *The Swordbearers*, 327.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Daniel Schumate, "The Allied Supreme War Council: 1917-1918, Volume I," Doctoral Dissertation (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia, 1952), 42.

brought about by husbanding our strength and resources with the greatest care, by awaiting a much fuller development of the fighting forces of the United States.”<sup>24</sup>

This concept meant that the managing of resources and strategic guidance would come from a single body, a Supreme War Council. Theoretically, this system could work if all its members agreed on policy goals, but resources continued to be a major concern for armies on the front. The introduction of American forces and their supplies soon dominated many discussions among high military commanders and political leaders. While logistical concerns were valid, someone had to develop an appropriate military strategy for coalition troops at the front in a language they can all understand.

By June 1917, General John Pershing, charged with overall command of American Forces in Europe, arrived in Paris. Pressure to incorporate the American’s into the war effort was immediately apparent. Lloyd George met regularly with the Prime Minister of France, Paul Painleve, to formalize a council of politicians and generals that could discuss war matters and provide a unified direction to forces at the front. In late October, political and military leaders planned to meet in Rapallo, Italy and discuss the allocation of troops. Foreshadowing the difficulty, the council would have with its coalition partners, Pershing refused to participate explaining, “the advice of war councils was not usually of any great value...the conduct of operations by the combined armies should be left entirely under military direction.”<sup>25</sup>

The initial conference in Rapallo met on November 5 and included discussions on the apportionment of divisions and the command structure for all Italian, French, and British units fighting together. Lloyd George explained, “We are ready to confide our troops to the valor of the

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<sup>24</sup> Lloyd George, *The War Memoirs of David Lloyd George, Volume IV* (London: Odhams Press, 1938), 531-540; as cited in Shumate, *The Allied Supreme War Council, 1917-1918*, 73.

<sup>25</sup> Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War, Volume I*, 213-214.

Italian nation, but in all frankness, we cannot confide them to the present supreme command.”<sup>26</sup>

French Prime Minister Painleve agreed with the British Prime Minister; now with the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Commanders Foch, Cadorna, and Wilson; they established the Supreme War Council, and its first meeting was complete. The council had the responsibility to watch over the conduct of the war and would be the body that approved all military actions that were to be carried out by the national armies.<sup>27</sup>

## The Amalgamation and Logistics Problem

Although organized, the Council struggled to offer the strategic direction to commanders that Lloyd George envisioned before its establishment. By November 12, the United States began to participate on the SWC, assigning General Tasker H. Bliss as the American representative. Access to American forces increased as did discussions addressing operational objectives. These talks became catalysts bringing the council to a pressing underlying issue: resources. Logistical matters became the main topic of debate among the Council. While national leaders made decisions on how to support the coalition’s field armies, a gap in theater strategy that could bring victory to the Western Front lingered.

Council members framed an important part of the strategic problem that plagued all the armies on the western front; not enough soldiers. Petain, Foch, and Sir William Robertson, the British Chief of the Imperial General Staff, wanted American regiments and battalions to serve under French and British commands. Pershing and his staff, however, intended to organize an

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<sup>26</sup> Schumate, “The Allied Supreme War Council: 1917-1918, Volume I,” 103; Rapallo Agreement of November 1917, Minutes of a Conference, Rapallo, 7 November 1917, Annex I, United States Department of the Army, *The United States Army in the World War, 1917-1919*, Volume 2 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1948), 70-72; World Peace Foundation, “The Supreme War Council,” *A League of Nations* 1, no. 7 (October 1918), 346-347.

<sup>27</sup> Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War, Volume I*, 215-216.

American Army in the field and refused the requests for amalgamation. Frustrated field commanders pleaded with the French and British governments who addressed their concerns directly with President Wilson.<sup>28</sup> Pershing explained that merging American troops into foreign armies presented a risk where American soldiers may lose a national identity, command control would be disrupted, and the quality of training would be unequal.<sup>29</sup> The president supported Pershing's recommendation, keeping American troops in Europe under Pershing's authority.

Denying the request for amalgamation frustrated the French and British but led to changes in the planning priorities of the Council. In November of 1917, the Supreme War Council included a base committee, the Military Council, where permanent national representatives resided. It coordinated with the Allied Maritime and Transportation Council (AMTC), to discuss American troop movements to France.<sup>30</sup> Without amalgamation, the council needed to increase the shipping tonnage for entire American divisions to help relieve pressure on the front. Increased shipping became a critical requirement for the coalition by the spring of 1918, and by February a total of 97,000 American troops were in France.<sup>31</sup> Allied losses in shipping because of the German submarine warfare increased the Council's coordination with ministries of

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<sup>28</sup> Terrence Finnegan, *A Delicate Affair on the Western Front* (Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2015), 30; David Trask, *The AEF and Coalition Warmaking, 1917-1918* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 36-37.

<sup>29</sup> Woodward, *The American Army and the First World War*, 136.

<sup>30</sup> In November of 1917 the Supreme War Council was composed of one organization, the military council. It grew to include the Allied Transportation Council to coordinate shipping of American forces. The interactions of the SWC increasingly blended with ministerial and political committees including a Munitions, Food, and Purchases & Finance Council. The Allied Blockade and Naval and Maritime Transportation Councils were also considered critical enablers of the Supreme War Council but met separately in London to discuss Naval strategies.

<sup>31</sup> Trask, *AEF & Coalition Warmaking*, 42.

commerce and shipping. The allies now needed to transport and supply an organic American Army of nearly 1,000,000 soldiers to help support the deteriorating conditions on the front.<sup>32</sup>

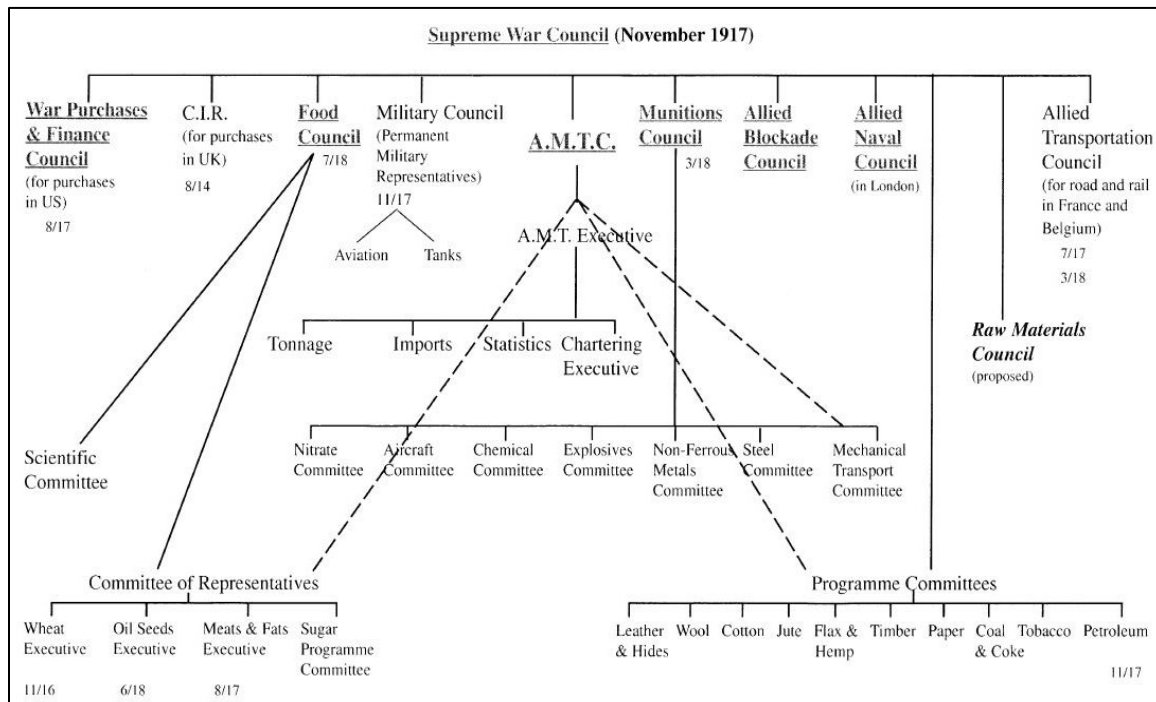


Figure 1. The Supreme War Council: Organization and relationships from 1917 to 1918

Source: Elizabeth Greenhalgh, "The Supreme War Council" in *1914-1918-Online: International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, accessed on October 11, 2016, [http://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/supreme\\_war\\_council](http://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/supreme_war_council).<sup>33</sup>

## The Organization and Command Problem

By its second meeting, the Supreme War Council addressed another major problem, the development and approval of strategy for army commanders. An indicator that this should be of concern were the difficulties of coordination between operational leaders, particularly over use of an international reserve force. The senior members of the council believed a strategic reserve was necessary to support the front, particularly when poor coordination was prevalent between armies.

<sup>32</sup> James A. Huston, *The Sinews of War: US Army Logistics 1775-1953* (Washington, DC: Center for Military History, 2014), 331.

<sup>33</sup> Underlined indicates ministerial, solid lines show reliance on information and coordination, dotted lines express consistent maritime coordination. This chart is approximate since interactions changed regularly. Organization dates are listed as month/year.

The establishment of an inter-allied reserve was an important topic with the Supreme War Council. It provided a force that could halt a large-scale German break penetration, and gave the coalition an opportunity to exploit success. Unfortunately, it required commanders of each national army to remove divisions from the front and consolidate them in a centralized location. The council retained the authority to allocate combat power across the front. Conceptually, the idea made sense, but commanders refused to make do without units that were critical. But who would be the single approval authority for this reserve if it was needed quickly?

Generals Petain and Haig particularly criticized the idea and did not want to give up forces to support the other national army. British Generals Haig and Robertson opposed the idea, recommending the French and British keep their divisions but sign a formal agreement to help one another if necessary. General Tasker Bliss immediately recognized that cooperation between the military commanders and the political leaders on the council was a considerable challenge that prevented the coalition from being successful on the western front.<sup>34</sup> Having to debate on the council for approval to deploy forces made cooperation even more challenging.

As American units continued to arrive and take positions on the front, it became increasingly apparent that someone had to provide unified direction to the various allied forces on the front. The council now had to coordinate with British, French, Belgian, Italian, and American members. American and French military representatives at the council, although supportive of a centralized reserve, argued that a coalition would fight best with a clear chain of command.<sup>35</sup> Americans on the SWC, with limited forces and influence, attempted to bridge the conflicting

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<sup>34</sup> Francis Joseph Reynolds, *The Story of the Great War, Volume XIV* (New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1919), 4155; David Trask, *The United States in the Supreme War Council: American War Aims and Inter-Allied Strategy, 1917-1918* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978), 56-57.

<sup>35</sup> Elizabeth Greenhalgh, *Foch in Command: The Forging of a First World War General* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 265-267.



views between the French and British by lobbying for a unified command. It was during this critical period for the coalition that the German spring offensive began. On March 21, a German attack along the Somme attempted to separate the French and British armies.

The German commander, General Erich Ludendorff, launched his offensive to break through the front and defeat the British and French forces before the Americans could reinforce them. He wanted to crush the smaller British and Belgian armies and then turn south to defeat the French exploiting the fragile coalition. Recognizing that cooperation and coordination between forces were intermittent at best, he focused his attack on the seam between the French and British troops, attempting to physically split the coalition. By March 24, the situation was dangerous as the Germans advanced nearly twenty miles at the French and British boundary.<sup>36</sup>

French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau, appointed in November, grew frustrated with the worsening conditions at the front, and met with the French Chief of Staff Foch to discuss options for committing a French reserve north to support a growing dilemma for the British. Foch suggested that a directing body of the war, potentially the Supreme War Council, make the official decision to commit reserves to the British depending on their reserve availability. The difficulties of determining the disposition of the British and employment of the French reserve, Clemenceau and Foch increased pressure on the council to establish a unified command.<sup>37</sup> While Petain and Haig attempted to coordinate through a series of liaisons, the British and French governments deliberated on who should be the allied commander. On March 26, Foch, a general

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<sup>36</sup> Blake, *The Private Papers of Douglas Haig*, 299-300; Takle, *Nine Divisions in Champagne*, 13.

<sup>37</sup> Greenhalgh, *Foch in Command*, 300; Greenhalgh, *Victory through Coalition*, 200-201; Seymour, *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House*, 249; Trask, *The AEF and Coalition Warming*, 49-51.

with experience both leading troops and coordinating with the Supreme War Council, was appointed as the Allied *Generalissimo* and commander of Allied armies in the west.<sup>38</sup>

The Supreme War Council, although ineffective at providing military direction to army generals, framed three critical problems: the shipping of American forces, an insufficient coalition reserve, and friction directing armies. By March 1918, the Council believed a single commander could manage and control operations at the front while they provided strategic direction and resourced logistical problems minimizing disjointed offensives. In the midst of the German attack, the appointment of General Foch as commander of Allied forces was a risk. Foch had to halt a German offensive and create an environment that allowed the different national armies to operate in unison. If he could solve these two problems, developing and implementing a theater strategy the coalition had a chance at survival.

## Section 2: Unified Command and Theater Strategy

Although selecting a Supreme Allied Commander was a step in the right direction, national armies were on the verge of collapse. With significant resource shortages and no common strategy, mistrust and jealousy plagued the different national armies. Foch had to organize a centralized reserve, leverage the council to provide the logistical support for each of his armies, and foster an environment where the different commanders could develop a level of trust and respect among one another to go on the offensive as a unified force. His first challenge would be to halt the German attack, and to do this he needed a reserve. General's Petain and Haig continued to test Foch in his new position by limiting the number of troops they could make available.<sup>39</sup> The German's pushed the British and French back nearly fifteen miles between La

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<sup>38</sup> Reynolds, *The Story of the Great War, Volume XIV*, 4156.

<sup>39</sup> Priscilla Roberts, "Tasker H. Bliss and the Evolution of Allied Unified Command, 1918: A Note on Old Battles Revisited," *The Journal of Military History* 65, no. 3 (July 2001), 680.

Ferre and Arras seizing territory west of the Somme. Foch, with a small staff, realized that Ludendorff might split French and British forces.

## The Generalissimo

Foch had to balance the interests of the coalition and maintain enough pressure to defeat the German offensive. His command structure and flow of information and support needed to allow the coalition to achieve its objectives while preventing favoritism for one nation. General Foch permanently assigned General Maxime Weygand as his chief of staff to mitigate this concern. Weygand was also to serve as the French representative to Supreme War Council and direct liaison to the Generalissimo.<sup>40</sup> Weygand had what Foch considered exceptional staff skills and a diplomatic tact that would be substantial while interacting with politicians and military leaders that had animosity towards one another and reluctance towards Foch's new command authority.<sup>41</sup>

While the German offensive continued to gain momentum, Weygand and Foch found themselves prioritizing efforts of the coalition. Within this management, the burden of getting more troops and supplies to his already exhausted armies was paramount and consumed his discussions with subordinate commanders. The Supreme War Council was very concerned that German success may eliminate the French war industry. As a result, the council balanced American and British shipping capabilities to ensure American forces were sent to the front soon

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<sup>40</sup> Anthony Clayton, *General Maxime Weygand, 1867-1965: Fortune and Misfortune*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2015), 35; Elizabeth Greenhalgh, *The French Army and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 266.

<sup>41</sup> Clayton, *General Maxime Weygand*, 33.

enough to support Foch's demand for troops.<sup>42</sup> The most serious problem of coordination was the question of how many and what types of troops were needed, and then what shipping arrangements were available to get them to support Foch.<sup>43</sup> While the council and Foch's staff debated this, German pressure grew significantly.

The British Expeditionary Force retrograded toward the English Channel protecting valuable British shipping ports, and the French Army withdrew in a direction to protect Paris. The rearward moving armies presented a vulnerable gap that separated the two forces.<sup>44</sup> From his Headquarters in Sarcus, France, Foch made his first important decision as commander of coalition forces. While Petain refused to send French reinforcements to Haig, Foch ordered Haig to defend Amiens. He then ordered Petain to ensure the two armies maintained contact with one another along the front.<sup>45</sup> Mounting casualties and the loss of ground continued to caused friction between Haig, Petain, and Foch, often making Weygand the "moderator" between the three commanders and their staffs behind the scenes.<sup>46</sup>

Petain and Haig managed to maintain contact, and by mid-April, the German offensive came to a halt, but conditions at the front were still ominous. Heavy losses made the demand for manpower more prevalent than ever. At this critical juncture, General Foch requested General

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<sup>42</sup> James Hallas, *Doughboy War: The American Expeditionary Force in World War I* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), 77; Huston, *The Sinews of War*, 334; Seymour, *Intimate Papers of Colonel House*, 311.

<sup>43</sup> Huston, *The Sinews of War*, 336.

<sup>44</sup> Clayton, *General Maxime Weygand*, 36; Trask, *The AEF and Coalition Warmaking*, 49-51.

<sup>45</sup> Greenhalgh, *Foch in Command*, 310-311; Schumate, *The Allied Supreme War Council, Volume II*, 570-571.

<sup>46</sup> Clayton, *General Maxime Weygand*, 37-38.

Pershing's assistance asking the American's to send a division to the British Fifth Army.<sup>47</sup>

Pershing, recognizing the dire circumstances, supported Foch and ordered the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division north to Cantigny.<sup>48</sup> Amalgamation of American forces was still something the coalition leaders wanted to increase their combat forces at the front, but this relieved some of the stress.

## Balancing Interests of the Coalition

Pershing recognized the severity of the situation and offered American assistance, but he also saw an opportunity to gain momentum in his efforts to establish an independent American Army. Ludendorff launched other offensives at Lys and Aines between April and May. In response, General Pershing, supplied six additional divisions through June to reinforce the heavy British losses.<sup>49</sup> France and Britain, however, were not satisfied with the troop numbers agreed upon at the last conference of the Supreme War Council and continued to plead for more American support. The British government, however, "did not wish to come to a deadlock with General Pershing and to appeal over his head, consequently they accepted an arrangement which they did not think adequately met the situation."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Greenhalgh, *Foch in Command*, 317; Marshall, *Memoirs of My Services in the World War*, 77.

<sup>48</sup> Liggett, *Commanding an American Army*, 24; Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War: Volume I*, 158-159; Trask, *AEF & Coalition Warmaking*, 53-55; Jehuda L. Wallach, *Uneasy Coalition: The Entente Experience in World War I* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993), 127.

<sup>49</sup> Greenhalgh, *Foch in Command*, 328; Supreme War Council Report of the Fifth Session, (Abbeville Conference), 10-11; Letter from General Tasker H. Bliss (Supreme War Council) to Newton D. Baker (Secretary of War), May 4, 1918, as cited in Frederick Palmer, *Bliss Peacemaker: The Life and Letters of General Tasker H. Bliss* (Binghamton, NY: Dodd Mead & Co., 1934), 262-263.

<sup>50</sup> Frazier to Secretary of State, May 6, 1918, telegram #54, United States Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States: 1918, Supplement 1, The World War* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1933), 326-327.

As a result of the demand for troops, Foch leveraged the Supreme War Council to increase the flow of American forces. The emphasis on the transportation was for personnel rather than material. The French and British had to ensure arriving forces were then armed and transported to the front.<sup>51</sup> The Military Board of Allied Supply was then established as a multi-national staff to coordinate French and British logistics support, but it was not without difficulties. While American units continued to arrive at the front, multi-national coordination for the supply of troops became a nightmare for the American staff. Major General Fox Conner, the chief of operations for the AEF staff in dealing with the board, said, “dealing with the enemy was simple and straightforward compared with securing co-operation with an ally.”<sup>52</sup>

With the help of Foch and Weygand, field commanders slowly improved cooperation with their coalition partners, General Petain in particular. In a memorandum published on May 8, 1918, Petain wrote instructions to his liaison officers explaining, “French officers should endeavor to be personal friends with American Officers... The French officers should, therefore, always endeavor to live with their American comrades under the best terms of friendship, and to gain their confidence by demonstrating to them that the advice which they give, and the criticisms which they make have no other object than the general interest.”<sup>53</sup> Pershing and some of his staff harbored general suspicions of the other commanders but recognized the AEFs role as subordinate to Foch.<sup>54</sup> He believed that French high officers often did not consider themselves

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<sup>51</sup> Huston, *The Sinews of War*, 336-337.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 339.

<sup>53</sup> Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War, Volume II*, 69.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 35; Trask, *The United States in the Supreme War Council*, 89;

superior to the Americans, but the two nations needed to build trust, rapport, and experience with one another to improve their relationship.<sup>55</sup>

The American conducted their first offensive action at Cantigny from May 28 to 31. General Robert Bullard, the commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division, called the salient at Cantigny the gateway toward the British Army. Seizing the salient, the division restored the front line for the British, but cost the Americans 1,600 casualties over three days of fighting.<sup>56</sup> As a result of inter-allied cooperation slowly encouraged mutual respect between operational leaders.<sup>57</sup> Being the Supreme Allied Commander during this tenuous period, often called the ‘May Crisis,’ was not easy. General Foch had to negotiate and persuade commanders to take action. By June 1, the Germans offensive was halted sixty kilometers from Paris. German forces threatened the front in the north and south, Foch demanded manpower support from the council and dealt with the hostile political climate presented by Clemenceau, Lloyd George, and Vittorio Orlando.<sup>58</sup>

By mid-June, a relief in pressure across the front allowed Foch to return the American divisions that were provided by Pershing in May.<sup>59</sup> Foch, having halted a significant German offensive, now had to develop a theater strategy that allowed the coalition to regain the initiative. His staff recognized vulnerable German positions around Soissons and began to pressure Haig to

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<sup>55</sup> Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War: Volume II*, 66.

<sup>56</sup> Spencer C. Tucker, ed. *The Encyclopedia of World War I: A Political, Social, and Military History, Volume I* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2005), 342-343.

<sup>57</sup> Schumate, “The Allied Supreme War Council: 1917-1918, Volume II,” 834.

<sup>58</sup> Anthony Clayton, *General Maxime Weygand*, 40-41; Greenhalgh, *Foch In Command*, 331-332; Patrick Takle, *Nine Divisions in Champagne: The Second Battle of the Marne* (Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Military, 2015), 84-85.

<sup>59</sup> Greenhalgh, *Foch in Command*, 366.

take the offensive.<sup>60</sup> There still existed a dangerous belief among many British officers that Foch was biased towards protecting Paris and preserving French troops.<sup>61</sup> British mistrust would take time and action for Foch to prove that he had all allied intentions in mind.<sup>62</sup> The council continued to prioritize shipping of American combat troops to support Foch and began to deliberate other strategic options that might help Foch manage reduced manpower in the front, namely opening another military theater.

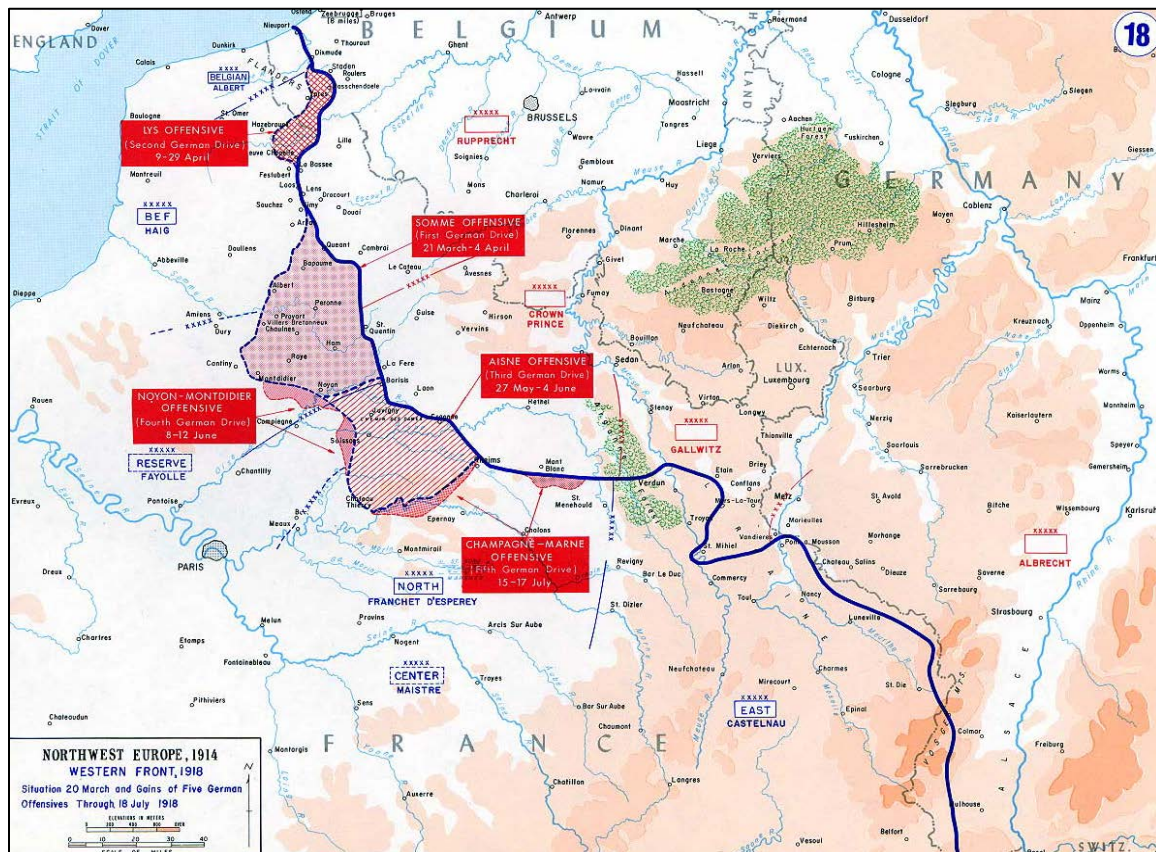


Figure 2. Ludendorff's Spring Offensives: March – July 1918

Source: US Military Academy Department of History, Campaign Atlas to the Great War, Western Front, Gains of the German Offensives, March - July 1918, accessed October 7, 2016, <http://www.westpoint.edu/history/SiteAssets/SitePages/World%20War%20I/WWOne18.jpg>

<sup>60</sup> Foch, *Memoirs of Marshal Foch*, 352-353, Greenhalgh, *Foch In Command*, 367-368; J.P. Harris, *Douglas Haig and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 478.

<sup>61</sup> Blake, *The Private Papers of Douglas Haig*, 305-306; Greenhalgh, *Victory through Coalition*, 225.

<sup>62</sup> Blake, *The Private Papers of Douglas Haig*, 309; Greenhalgh, *Foch in Command*, 381.



## Developing Theater Strategy and Seizing the Initiative

Foch and Weygand had to balance the pressure of intense political disputes and internal friction at the operational level. Initially, the Supreme War Council considered matters like managing the allied reserve within their role of responsibility. Lloyd George's vision of the Council was to provide political influence on some of the military affairs along the front. The nature of Foch's appointment, however, gave him authority to use military means and develop theater strategies, including the employment of a centralized reserve.<sup>63</sup> General Foch's unified command of forces diminished the influence that the council had on actions along the front allowing Foch to prepare military strategies. The political and military members of the SWC, with a shift in focus, addressed strategic options for the coalition and solved logistical problems that were brought up as important by Foch. As a result, the Council, with political influence and the ability to prioritize and coordinate shipping resources, shaped what military means were available to Foch for him to develop an effective strategy.

By June, the American Expeditionary Force had fourteen divisions along the front, and an influenza pandemic became a significant concern but affected Germans forces the greatest, helping to halt their attack westward.<sup>64</sup> Additional coalition forces and slowing of German attacks was an enormous relief of pressure for the coalition. Foch, visualizing a large-scale offensive to regain the initiative conferred with his subordinate commanders on June 28 and developed a strategy. Foch wanted to take advantage of intelligence reports indicating a German attack that would begin on July 15 near the Marne.<sup>65</sup> By springing a counter-attack, Foch wanted to catch

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<sup>63</sup> Blake, *The Private Papers of Douglas Haig*, 301-302; Trask, *The United States in the Supreme War Council*, 67-69.

<sup>64</sup> Harris, *Douglas Haig and the First World War*, 480.

<sup>65</sup> Blake, *The Private Papers of Douglas Haig*, 318; Trask, *The AEF and Coalition Warmaking*, 82.

the Germans off guard and enable the operational level leaders to regain the initiative in their portion of the front.

The Germans attacked as suggested on July 15 attempting to seize the strategic city of Reims. However, the French 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Armies along with divisions from Hunter Liggett's I Corps put up stubborn resistance. The American 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division defended a fourteen-kilometer stretch that included a crossing over the Marne River critical to Germans. The division's stiff resistance earned its the nickname "Rock of the Marne."<sup>66</sup> The Second Battle of the Marne was an important battle for the Coalition for two reasons. First, Foch had quickly implemented a minor but important strategy with his subordinate commanders. Second, it was the first-time operational leaders of different national forces defeated a German attack together. American units fought under the French, and the American I Corps was the first Corps to command foreign troops since the American Revolution.<sup>67</sup>

On July 18, Foch launched a full counter-offensive. He coordinated massed artillery and tank support for an attack into the German salient. Pershing and his troops were ready for the assault, but Haig and Petain were not. Haig was concerned with indications of a German attack in Flanders, and asked Foch to reorganize allied forces and return his XXII Corps to the BEF. Petain was apprehensive about losing a British Corps.<sup>68</sup> Despite these reservations, Foch exercised his authority, and the counter-offensive pushed into the German salient. By July 20, German

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<sup>66</sup> Takle, *Nine Divisions in Champagne*, 107-108; Woodward, *The American Army and the First World War*, 280-281.

<sup>67</sup> Trask, *The AEF and Coalition Warmaking*, 83; Liggett, *Commanding an American Army*, 31.

<sup>68</sup> Greenhalgh, *Foch in Command*, 399-401; Ryan, *Petain the Soldier*, 171.

resistance stiffened, and the coalition attacks halted with only minor gains in the American sector across the Vesle River.<sup>69</sup> The Allies finally reduced the Marne salient.

This small counter-offensive accomplished important coalition objectives for Foch and created a clear delineation of the roles and responsibilities of the Supreme Commander and the Supreme War Council. Victory on the Marne protected Paris, retained the city of Reims, and allowed the American forces to establish an Army command.<sup>70</sup> Foch was building trust and respect among his subordinates and developing a successful theater strategy for the coalition, a critical part of multinational operations.<sup>71</sup> On August 6 the battle ended and Clemenceau honored Foch as a Marshal of France. The council had no formal meetings after its seventh session in July until discussions of armistice began to arise in October. Informally, its members met while the coalition transitioned to the offense and developed other strategic options.

## Intervention in Russia and Macedonia

While Foch began prepared to seize the initiative from the Germans, the political and military leaders of the SWC debated on strategic options to help bring the war to a close in 1919.<sup>72</sup> The leaders on the council were impatient with Foch and allied progress in France and Italy. Social pressure demanded that they do something that would shorten the war and not prolong the potential for bloody battles in France. Believing that the Americans would not play a crucial role in supporting Foch in the west until 1919, it was critical to draw German strength

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<sup>69</sup> Foch, *The Memoirs of Marshal Foch*, 364-367; Harris, *Douglas Haig and the First World War*, 492; Liggett, *Commanding an American Army*, 44.

<sup>70</sup> Foch, *The Memoirs of Marshal Foch*, 368; Greenhalgh, *Foch in Command*, 406.

<sup>71</sup> Field Manual (FM) 3-16, *The Army in Multinational Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2014), 1-3; Allied Joint Publication (AJP) 5, *Allied Joint Doctrine for Operational Level Planning* (Shrivenham: Ministry of Defense, 2013), 1-3.

<sup>72</sup> Trask, *The United States in the Supreme War Council*, 95.

away from France and Italy. The council, therefore, considered opening fronts in Siberia and the Urals.<sup>73</sup> The SWC also explored other strategic pressures on the coalition to include preventing Bolshevik expansion by sending French and American forces into Siberia.<sup>74</sup>

At the fourth, fifth, and sixth sessions of the Council in early 1918, leaders debated potential for intervention in Russia, but the coordination of logistical efforts and delineation of authority with a new command structure often took priority. Foch, aware of the deliberations of the council, did not want to lose American manpower to other theaters, especially since the potential for a large-scale counter-offensive became a reality. He wanted to ensure that Pershing could form a separate American Army, and therefore would allow him to concentrate American resources and leverage the political desires for a larger American part in the action at the front.<sup>75</sup>

By the seventh session in July the council was prepared to make decisions on other strategic options despite Foch's efforts. Because the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk ceded Russian territory to the Germans, many French leaders feared that Germany would recruit troops or repatriate old prisoners of war and bolster their troop numbers in the west.<sup>76</sup> Britain and France called to intervene in Russia and send military forces that would reduce Germany's ability to draw resources from Russia and prevent complete withdrawal of German troops in the east. President Wilson however, refused to violate the territorial integrity of Russia. Only when there

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<sup>73</sup> Palmer, *Bliss: Peacemaker*, 311; Trask, *The US in the Supreme War Council*, 134-137.

<sup>74</sup> Palmer, *Bliss: Peacemaker*, 299; Trask, *The US in the Supreme War Council*, 121-122.

<sup>75</sup> Huston, *Sinews of War*, 379.

<sup>76</sup> Trask, *The United States in the Supreme War Council*, 100.

was widespread support for an intervention in Murmansk and Siberia, did the United States support a response, which was often very limited.<sup>77</sup>

Between July and August, the French, British, and Italians members of the Supreme War Council mentioned engaging in other interventions. Reports that Bulgaria, weakened by frequent food riots and distress, was vulnerable to attack that would force Austria to allocate troops in its defense.<sup>78</sup> The French and Italians considered actions in Macedonia aimed at stretching the Austrian army to a breaking point, while the British pushed for greater efforts in the Middle East. The Americans, much like their initial opposition to Russian intervention, did not want to divert more men and materials away from where its field army was taking shape.<sup>79</sup> Military and political leaders formed coalition strategy under these different national objectives. Deliberation through informal meetings and letters complicated the direction of the coalition. Clemenceau proposed a unilateral French action in Macedonia because of new American troops that could take French positions on the front. Lloyd George and Wilson soon pointed out that such action would contradict the strategy to regain the initiative on the western front.<sup>80</sup>

Although the coalition implemented the Russian intervention, lack of support for opening a Macedonian theater enabled Foch to launch a full-scale offensive in 1918. Had the Macedonian theater been opened, it was likely American troops would have been a major part in supporting Italian operations, and it may have significantly delayed the arrival of American divisions required to build First Army. It would have certainly had an effect on Pershing's ability to launch

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<sup>77</sup> George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations Since 1776*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 422-423; Trask, *The US in the Supreme War Council*, 118-119.

<sup>78</sup> Reynolds, *The Story of the Great War, Volume XIV*, 4342.

<sup>79</sup> Bullard, *Personalities and Reminiscences of the War*, 205; Trask, *The United States in the Supreme War Council*, 131.

<sup>80</sup> Trask, *The United States in the Supreme War Council*, 134.

a counter-offensive in 1918. The focus now for Foch and his staff was to leverage the council and continue to accelerate the arrival of American troops in their sector near St. Mihiel.

## The Coalition on the Offensive

The Supreme War Council spent most of June and July coordinating with the AMTC to organize and prioritizing shipping efforts to bring 500,000 American troops to France by August.<sup>81</sup> Although it risked reducing the time for those forces to train and prepare for combat, in doing so, the council allowed Foch to sign the Pershing-Milner-Foch agreement that emphasized the critical need because of circumstances at the front and a looming offensive by the coalition.<sup>82</sup> The agreement accelerated the flow of forces to France and allowed Foch and his staff to create a theater strategy that helped the coalition to seize the initiative. On August 11, three days after the battle of Amiens began, intelligence indicated a large-scale German withdrawal.<sup>83</sup> Foch wanted to push across the front. His strategy was to demoralize the enemy with a series of sharp blows seizing key railway lines and raw materials. Germans used key logistics hubs to move forces across the theater and ship raw materials to industrial centers in the East.<sup>84</sup>

Foch's strategy directed the British to seize bridgeheads over the Somme on August 26. Petain, having taken heavy casualties, was not robust enough to deliver a severe blow and therefore had to maintain gains provided by the British attack.<sup>85</sup> The Americans, however, had an increased role further south. They were to reduce the St. Mihiel salient and prevent the Germans

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<sup>81</sup> Palmer, *Bliss Peacemaker*, 210.

<sup>82</sup> Trask, *The United States in the Supreme War Council*, 91-92.

<sup>83</sup> Greenhalgh, *Victory Through Coalition*, 250.

<sup>84</sup> Woodward, *The American Army and the First World War*, 302.

<sup>85</sup> Foch, *The Memoirs of Marshal Foch*, 381; Ryan, *Petain the Soldier*, 176.

from using the Commercy Railway.<sup>86</sup> Foch urged Pershing to seize the ground quickly explaining that the Allies must keep their offensives together primarily to allow the British to attack. Likely this was meant to flatter Pershing and build rapport in their relationship.<sup>87</sup> Foch's orders to Pershing were the first time the AEF received an operational objective to support a coalition strategy.<sup>88</sup>

Pershing's staff concentrated the most experienced and reliable American corps and divisions near the St. Mihiel sector to help achieve Foch's strategic aim.<sup>89</sup> By August 30, the American First Army, consisting of three American and one French Colonial Corps was prepared to attack.<sup>90</sup> Petain provided Pershing with a corps because he explained that it was, "concrete evidence of the vast faith that he had in the military abilities of the AEF and the leadership of Pershing and his corps commanders."<sup>91</sup> With clearly structured plans and orders produced by Foch's staff, previously tense relationships between army commanders were growing into supportive ones.

The First Army began its attack on the St. Mihiel Salient on September 12 and Pershing assured Foch the Americans were prepared to attack towards the Meuse after it reduced the St Mihiel salient.<sup>92</sup> The concept of the operation developed was simple and attainable, but many of the Germans evacuated the salient simultaneous to the American attack leaving some fortified

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<sup>86</sup> Foch, *The Memoirs of Marshal Foch*, 398.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 383; Greenhalgh, *Foch in Command*, 427.

<sup>88</sup> Foch, *The Memoirs of Marshal Foch*, 399; Greenhalgh, *Foch in Command*, 409.

<sup>89</sup> Cooke, *Pershing and his Generals*, 119.

<sup>90</sup> Liggett, *Commanding an American Army*, 60.

<sup>91</sup> Wuxsin diary, 11 August 1918, as cited in Greenhalgh, *Foch in Command*, 429.

<sup>92</sup> Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War: Volume II*, 254.

machinegun nests with artillery to delay the American advance.<sup>93</sup> Seizing of the St. Mihiel salient provided a morale boost to the Americans and the coalition as an opportunity for relationship building between the operational and tactical commanders of the different national armies.

By September 15, the German salient near St Mihiel was reduced, but the Mezieres-Sedan-Metz railway and the iron reserves in the region were still in use by the Germans. Foch continued to pressure Pershing to shift quickly from the St. Mihiel salient towards the Argonne.<sup>94</sup> The transition from the St. Mihiel Salient towards the Argonne placed great stress on logistical capabilities of the American supply system, but Pershing understood the intent by seizing the strategic objectives for Foch and wanted to make a good impression on the capacity of the young and newly organized Army.

General Henri Gouraud, commanding the French Fourth Army, supported the American attack by moving west to turn the Germans out of their positions and compel them to withdraw, facilitating the American advance.<sup>95</sup> Throughout the planning phase, Petain met with Pershing to discuss their scheme of maneuver and pinpoint the locations of strong German forces that had to be destroyed.<sup>96</sup> The operation began on September 26, and the Americans made progress within the first five hours reaching their designated lines. Unfortunately, the French 4<sup>th</sup> Army advanced only four kilometers.<sup>97</sup> Foch was infuriated at the slow French progress that presented a gap in the

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<sup>93</sup> Cooke, *Pershing and his Generals*, 119.

<sup>94</sup> Foch, *Memoirs of Marshal Foch*, 393; Lloyd, *Hundred Days*, 137.

<sup>95</sup> Lloyd, *Hundred Days*, 153; Trask, *The AEF and Coalition Warmaking*, 149.

<sup>96</sup> Liggett, *Commanding and American Army*, 77-78; Lloyd, *Hundred Days*, 155; Marshall, *Memoirs of My Services in the World War*, 158-159; Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War*, 293-294.

<sup>97</sup> Lloyd, *The Hundred*, 156; Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War*, 296-297.



line. Pershing, not wanting to undermine his French comrades, argued with Foch and worked with Petain to close the gap. Foch acceded to Pershing allowing the attack to press forward.<sup>98</sup>

On September 29, a British and French attack in the center of the German lines allowed the Allies to maintain pressure along the entire two-hundred and fifty-mile front. Haig broke through the lines, but German reinforcements reacted quickly and slowed his advance. Foch decided to promote a widened American attack in the south to draw German reinforcements away from the British portion of the front.<sup>99</sup> The Coalition then opened the American front east of the Meuse on October 12, and Pershing established the American Second Army becoming an Army group commander, the operational equivalent to Petain and Haig.<sup>100</sup> Without the bitter logistical and strategic debates of the Supreme War Council, the Coalition could not have had the success it did under Foch. Debates over shipping, transportation, and naval blockade efforts supported Foch's strategy. By spring of 1917, the political nature of the council and unified command of the national armies finally created the powerful coalition Lloyd George desired in 1917.

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<sup>98</sup> Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War*, 329.

<sup>99</sup> Trask, *The AEF and Coalition Warfighting*, 133.

<sup>100</sup> Liggett, *Commanding and American Army*, 90; Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War*, 329.

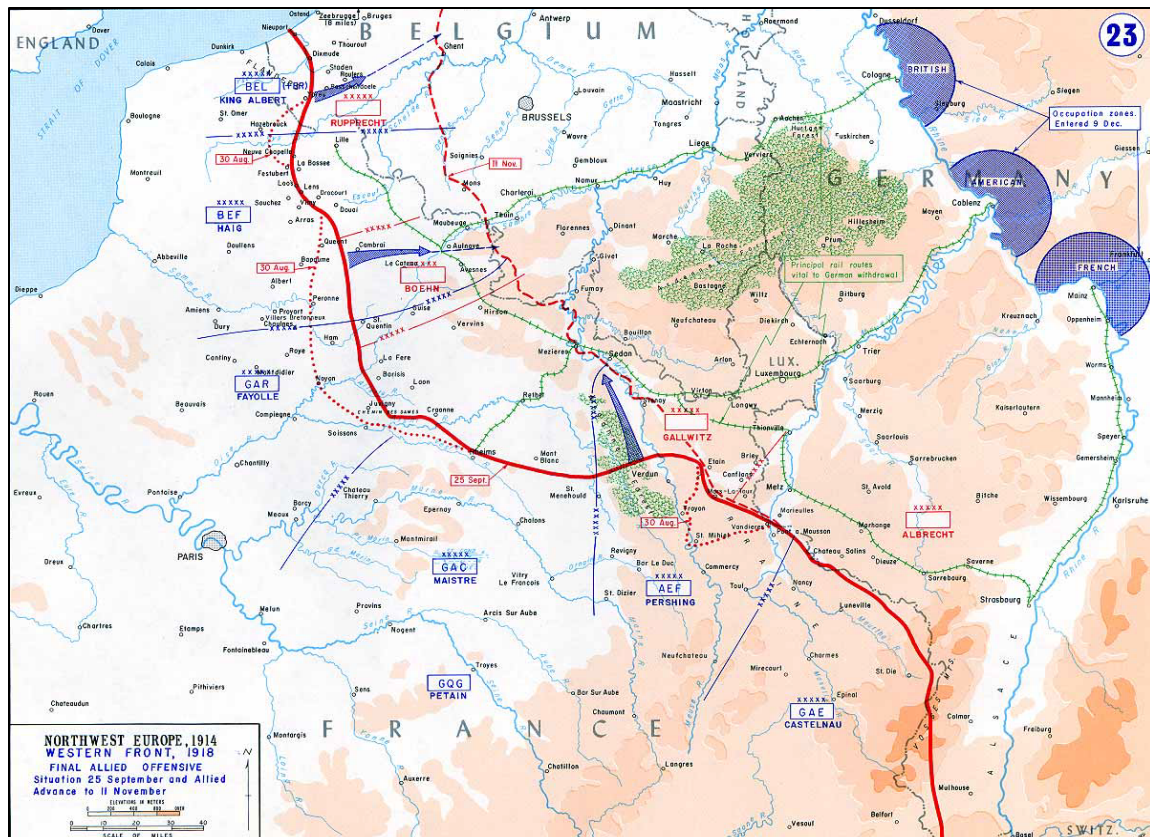


Figure 3. Foch's Counter-Offensive: September – November 1918

Source: US Military Academy Department of History, Campaign Atlas to the Great War, Western Front, Allied Offensive, 25 September - 11 November 1918, accessed October 7, 2016, <http://www.westpoint.edu/history/SiteAssets/SitePages/World%20War%20I/WWOne23.jpg>

### Section 3: The Armistice and Political Influence

As October came to a close, the Supreme War Council and National leaders considered terms for an Armistice. Prince Max of Baden, deemed a political moderate by the Germans and therefore suitable to deliberate with the allied powers, reached out to President Wilson to negotiate a peace proposal based on his Fourteen Points.<sup>101</sup> As political leadership arranged a pre-armistice settlement, Foch went to his commanders to review what he considered acceptable terms that he would propose to the Supreme War Council. As the military approached a proposal for peace, diverging national interests overcame the focus of the coalition. Separate national

<sup>101</sup> Macmillan, *Paris 1919*, 19; Trask, *The US and the Supreme War Council*, 153.

interests began to influence theater strategy and operational leaders. This was contrary to coalition policy and severely damaged the coalition as it transitioned into the occupation.

## The Armistice and Diverging National Interests

Despite the challenges the coalition overcame and the significant growth of its leaders in less than nine months, mutual harmony did not last. This period of transition placed stress on its leaders causing hostility between political, strategic, and operational commanders. As the value of political gains increased with a potential for peace, coalition relationships broke down and returned to a state where national priorities become more important than that of the coalition. The Germans deliberated an Armistice with President Wilson, who attempted to maintain diplomatic efforts not tied to territorial commitments with the intent to prevent militarism and balance the world order after the war.<sup>102</sup> National and military pride, however, degraded the ability of military commanders to cooperate under French Command. Foch formally presented desired military terms of the armistice to the Supreme War Council, and although previously agreed upon, Haig, Pershing, and Petain brought forward harsher, pessimistic responses that conflicted with those outlined by Foch.<sup>103</sup>

The United States attempted to remain as diplomatically independent as possible throughout the war, particularly in its actions on the Supreme War Council, as seen in the discussions on intervention. Britain desired imperialistic gains after the war finished and France and Italy were often vengeful and desperate for political gains and territorial security. This forced Anglo-American politicians to restrain their partners diplomatically. Throughout Foch's counter-

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<sup>102</sup> Cohrs, *The Unfinished Peace*, 30-31; Seymour, *Intimate Papers of Colonel House*, 80-81; Trask, *The US and the Supreme War Council*, 151.

<sup>103</sup> Blake, *The Private Papers of Douglas Haig*, 330; Cohrs, *The Unfinished Peace*, 37, 40; Greenhalgh, *Foch in Command*, 473-474.

offensive, President Wilson began what he considered a peace offensive with Germany refusing to become as politically entangled in commitments, as France, Britain, and Italy had. Between September and October, Wilson sent notes to Germany and Austria-Hungary as a basis to begin peace settlements.<sup>104</sup>

The Supreme War Council began pre-armistice negotiations in late October. This became the most climactic action of their involvement in the war. Negotiations took place in Paris on October 31. Wilson's correspondence with the Central Powers made the other senior members of the council uneasy, and they began to draft military and naval conditions they wanted to see in the armistice, mostly pointing towards the disarmament of Germany.<sup>105</sup> Bliss and Wilson disagreed with many of these stipulations which, in their opinion, needed to focus less on disarmament and more on cessation of hostilities.<sup>106</sup> Wilson, Clemenceau, and Lloyd George agreed, however, that separation of forces and political reforms to include the removal of the Kaiser, were necessary to ensure that the Germans were not regrouping for another offensive.<sup>107</sup> Prince Max sent a note on October 23 explaining that he intended to do just that.

Foch and his commanders created a list of military demands for the armistice between October 23 and 25. It became a source of immense tension between field commanders. Foch and Petain outlined an almost uncompromising list of demands. Haig, fearing an increased German resistance, put forth his recommendations that were considered both moderate and acceptable.

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<sup>104</sup> Macmillan, *Paris 1919*, 19-20, Trask, *The US in the Supreme War Council*, 152.

<sup>105</sup> Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*, 421; Macmillan, *Paris 1919*, 22; Seymour, *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House*, 128.

<sup>106</sup> Palmer, *Bliss Peacemaker*, 342.

<sup>107</sup> Palmer, *Bliss: Peacemaker*, 346; Seymour, *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House*, 93-94; Trask, *The US in the Supreme War Council*, 156-157.

Pershing, supportive of Haig's recommendations, did not agree with Foch and Petain.<sup>108</sup> He explained what he considered poor judgment of the French demands to Baker, Bliss, and House, who informed Wilson as he met with other political leaders. Outside of the council meetings, Lloyd George, Clemenceau and Wilson held unofficial gatherings to discuss the armistice without military advisors. The Supreme War Council met only capture on record the results of their private discussions. This enabled the politicians to agree on terms that would have been tough to discuss, but perhaps more acceptable to all nations with the entire council present.<sup>109</sup>

On November 1, after Austria-Hungary and Turkey expressed their consent of the terms for armistice, the pre-armistice was accepted. On November 4, the Supreme War Council held its final meeting to review and make official, the armistice proposal. From here forward, the Supreme War Council's part in interpreting national policies to inform and support the theater strategies developed by Foch would change. The Supreme War Council's role in providing strategic and policy guidance to Foch was diminished by the establishment of Inter-Allied Rhineland High Commission that would supervise the activity of the occupation forces.

The transition to occupation provided new challenges to the coalition. The occupation force was established to maintain order and civil governance, enforce disarmament and reparations, but also to be prepared to fight the German Army if they failed to cooperate with the cessation of hostilities. The French, British, and American Armies reorganized their forces and planned to a long-term occupation of German territory. Personal agendas and separate national interests influenced the long-term occupation, although its initial operational planning and execution were efficient and effective.

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<sup>108</sup> Blake, *The Private Papers of Douglas Haig*, 337.

<sup>109</sup> Foch, *Memoirs of Marshal Foch*, 462; Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War, Volume II*, 362-363; Ryan, *Petain the Soldier*, 178-179; Trask, *The US in the Supreme War Council*, 161-162.

The time between the Armistice in November of 1918 and the establishment of the Inter-Allied Rhineland Commission in June of 1919 showed how effective the coalition may have been. Political influence, beginning in December of 1918, however, prevented strategic decision making and deteriorated the coalition to its pre-1917 condition. Losing the trust and rapport they had established during the counter-offensive of 1918, friction caused the coalition break apart by January of 1923 forcing the American to withdraw from Coblenz.

## The Occupation

The armistice went into effect on November 11 at 11:00 am. Foch's General Headquarters published a stand-fast order at 6:50 am to all forces on the front, emphasizing that defensive precautions be taken to minimize unnecessary loss of life.<sup>110</sup> He directed no communications with German forces and specified that British, French, and American forces establish an occupation force and maintain readiness levels to defend against a German offensive if it arises.<sup>111</sup> While the forces reorganized and prepared to occupy their assigned zones, there were political concerns with the occupation clause of the armistice. The French aggressively pursued the occupation and refused to agree to any armistice terms without it. The Americans and British feared that the French demands for occupation had concealed motives that would eventually lead to the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine.<sup>112</sup> This increased tensions between national leaders, and also between Foch's GHQ and the field commanders.

The plan to occupy, called "Watch on the Rhine", was designed to allow 'breathing space' for the German Army. It provided them with six days to move away from the front and

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<sup>110</sup> Bayliss, *The Occupation of the Rhineland*, 10; Seymour, *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House*, 143-145.

<sup>111</sup> Bayliss, *The Occupation of the Rhineland*, 12.

<sup>112</sup> Blake, *The Private Papers of Douglas Haig*, 354; Nelson, *Victors Divided*, 81-82.

return to the fatherland. There was evidence that Marshal Foch saw the occupation as the beginning of a process that would establish the Rhine as the new French and German boundary or establish a buffer zone between the two nations.<sup>113</sup> It became an initial point of friction between the allies and led to future political disruption. British leaders believed that the occupation would lead to permanent border realignment, but the Americans attempted to hold a neutral position to both restrain their allies and control their foes.<sup>114</sup> The members of the Supreme War Council found themselves heavily debating the layout of the occupation that was demanded by the French.

Ultimately Foch and the Allied commanders agreed to stop their offensive if they obtained an advantageous position. That position was along the Rhine, a large natural obstacle that Germany may have used to significantly slow or defeat allied attacks into Germany.<sup>115</sup> Foch visualized well-defended positions at four critical bridgeheads across the river that allowed the coalition to resume an offensive quickly if needed. Cologne, Koblenz, Mainz, and Strasbourg gave his forces the advantage the coalition wanted. Mounting British pressure on Foch constrained him to eliminate the occupation of Strasbourg, and reduced the Army's ability to requisition supplies from the Rhinelander population.<sup>116</sup>

On November 17, the vanguard of the British, French, and American occupation forces began its movement into their occupation zones to seize the vital bridgeheads at Cologne, Koblenz, and Mayence, occupying on the western side of the Rhine.<sup>117</sup> By December 17, the

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<sup>113</sup> Pawley, *The Watch on the Rhine*, 18; B.H. Liddell-Hart, *Foch, the Man of Orleans 1914-1924, Volume II* (London: Penguin, 1937), 431.

<sup>114</sup> Macmillan, *Paris 1919*, 159; Keith L. Nelson, *Victors Divided: American and the Allies in Germany: 1918-1923* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1975), xi.

<sup>115</sup> Foch, *The Memoirs of Marshal Foch*, 489-490.

<sup>116</sup> Nelson, *Victors Divided*, 20.

<sup>117</sup> Foch, *The Memoirs of Marshal Foch*, 489.

bridgeheads were held by the coalition and allied forces began the supervision of civil administration in their zones. Commander's established civil control and set defensive positions in case the Germans did not respect the terms of the armistice.<sup>118</sup> This critical transition point needed higher command involvement to support interaction with the Rhineland government, but it never came.

In response to growing requirements, Foch delegated much of his military authority to the subordinate British, French, American, and Belgian commanders. After establishing zones of control and the guidelines of civil affairs for each army, Foch turned his planning focus upward into the political and strategic levels. The Supreme War Council transitioned its focus to policy matters of the occupation, leading to the establishment of the permanent Inter-Allied Armistice Commission (IAAC). As the supervisory organization, the IAAC ensured all the conditions outlined in the armistice were being adhered to and maintained formal communications with the German Government.<sup>119</sup> Between January and March, Foch's staff realized a commission to supervise civil and military affairs was necessary for the occupation zone. Soon the Rhineland commission, composed mostly of civilian representatives, was adopted with its Headquarters in Koblenz. Under significant French influence, the commission supervised all activities in the Rhineland, increasing the already tense climate.

Deliberations for the final Versailles Peace Treaty conferences also took place at this time. Fundamental differences between the coalition's approach to peace would ignite further conflict during the occupation. These political disagreements – unresolved after the Treaty was signed – revolved around four main issues: the occupation of the Rhineland, the future of security

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<sup>118</sup> United States Department of the Army, *The United States Army in the World War, 1917-1919, Volume 11* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1948), 144.

<sup>119</sup> Allen, *The Rhineland Occupation*, 35.



in the region, the Polish-German border, and reparations.<sup>120</sup> The French, who maintained a physical border with Germany and had to recover from a significant amount of damage after the war, desired a border zone and a militarily weakened Germany. Britain and America, however, were more concerned with the economic fallout from the conflict and maintained strong views supporting free trade. Essentially, Wilson, Lloyd George, and Clemenceau had to establish a political agreement balancing different domestic pressures.<sup>121</sup>

Britain reluctantly accepted an occupation clause in the treaty. Much discontent came from the vague promise to withdraw occupying forces when Germany fulfilled its obligations in the treaty and the coalition agreed that the German government had proof of general goodwill.<sup>122</sup> The challenge in measuring and deciding the end such an occupation was apparent. As the agreement was drafted and approved for ratification in June, the United States was the only nation that denied the proposal. Because the United States Senate rejected the ratification of the proposal, they did not take part in the League of Nations and did not have representation in the IAAC during the occupation.<sup>123</sup>

## The Future of the Coalition

By 1920 the British, Belgian, and Americans reduced the number of forces in their assigned zone. Diminished border security, however, was a concern for the French who conversely increased their troop numbers. British and American decision-makers feared that growing French troops in the region may create a semi-independent Rhineland under French

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<sup>120</sup> Cohrs, *The Unfinished Peace*, 46; Edmonds, *Occupation of the Rhineland*, 185-186; Macmillan, *Paris 1919*, 200-201.

<sup>121</sup> Cohrs, *The Unfinished Peace*, 48; Seymour, *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House*,

<sup>122</sup> Edmonds, *The Occupation of the Rhineland*, 186; Nelson, *Victors Divided*, 120.

<sup>123</sup> Macmillan, *Paris 1919*, 492.

control.<sup>124</sup> The appointment of Poincare in January of 1922 made French policy even more demanding, particularly for the Americans, increasing instability within the coalition. The French demanded reparations from Germany, who passively resisted because of a decreasing value of the mark and increasing Bolshevik disturbances.<sup>125</sup>

The differences between French and American policy were apparent in Secretary of State Charles Hughes' New Haven Speech in December 1922. He addressed the deteriorating Franco-German relations and denounced French unilateral actions against Germany.<sup>126</sup> This pressured the Allied Commission to increase French troops in the American zone and establish martial law stressing Franco-American relations.<sup>127</sup> By January of 1923, President Harding and the American leaders of the High Commission decided to withdraw from the Rhineland. The decision to withdraw, although a blatant political move to rebuke French actions, fractured the coalition.<sup>128</sup>

## Conclusion

Understanding the organization of the Supreme War Council and the appointment of General Foch helps explain the challenges of coalition warfighting. A common strategy, unified command structure, the capacity to solve logistical problems and deliberate strategic options made the coalition successful in 1918. These elements transcend coalitions through history and are important in current multi-national doctrine.<sup>129</sup> The influence of national political agendas,

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<sup>124</sup> Cohrs, *The Unfinished Peace*, 54-55; Nelson, *Victors Divided*, 162.

<sup>125</sup> Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*, 458.

<sup>126</sup> Cohrs, *The Unfinished Peace*, 87.

<sup>127</sup> Nelson *Victors Divided*, 222.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 249-251.

<sup>129</sup> FM 3-16, *The Army in Multinational Operations*, 1-1-1-2; Joint Publication (JP) 3-16, *Multinational Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2013), III-1-III-3; AJP 5, *Allied Joint Doctrine for Operational-Level Planning*, 1-9-1-11; NATO Publication, *Comprehensive Operations Planning Directive, Version 2.0* (Brussels: Allied Command Operations, 2013), 4-101-4-103.

however, weakened the coalition and prevented it from being successful both in 1917 and again during the occupation of the Rhineland through 1923. By exploring these areas, the Western Front case study allows operational artists to recognize and mitigate the issues that frustrate coalition activities.

Enabling partners to build trust and rapport is a critical factor in allowing forces with different cultural values to operate collectively. The coalition's field commanders slowly improved their once bitter and independent relationships during the German Spring Offensive. Foch, considered commander with authority in the coalition hierarchy, enabled this by acting in an impartial manner taking in the considerations of all the coalition partners but focusing them onto the objectives of the coalition as a single entity. During the pre-armistice negotiations, however, the decisions made by Foch were no longer impartial for the betterment of the coalition. As Foch took more efforts to support French policy above other nation's considerations, it undermined his authority and decreased the confidence in the coalition. This planted the seeds of discontent among politicians and military commanders that bore bitter fruit by 1923.

Without a strategic aim between 1915 and 1917, the Belgian, British, French, and Italian armies directly managed offensive and defensive actions in their portion of the front, but never presented operational dilemmas to the Germans. Ludendorff's Spring Offensive is a good example of how a strategic aim was translated into operational art. He believed that he could splinter the coalition along the French and British boundary near the Somme. At a time when the coalition was weakened by the loss of Russia and unable to mobilize American resources, Ludendorff visualized the defeat of the British Expeditionary Force as a tactical action that supported the aim of defeating the coalition. Lloyd George recognized the weakness after and established the Supreme War Council to develop a coalition military strategy.

The Council attempted to develop a deliberate strategy, but was soon preoccupied with unrealized logistical problems and bureaucratic political discourse. The appointment of Foch as

the *Generalissimo* in charge of all Allied forces came at a point of crisis when Ludendorff attacked a vulnerable position at the front. Committing a multi-national reserve proved difficult in a council of political and military leaders. The Council realized the need for a unified command and the Supreme Allied Command emerged to streamline communications and decision-making for the coalition.

While Foch and his multi-national force attempted to halt the German attacks, he used his authority and influence to manage relationships within his command. Foch's leadership required him to balance hard and soft, direct and indirect communications with subordinates who were prone to conflict.<sup>130</sup> He recognized the importance of mutual confidence, and organized his staff with individuals embodying the personal skills and tact to build relationships between operational and tactical leaders of the coalition.<sup>131</sup> The command environment that Foch created was essential in building on a tense relationship between leaders from multiple nations and established trust, respect, and a positive climate where relationships grew in unity.

After halting the Spring Offensive, Foch, focused on developing an effective theater strategy. His first priority included regaining the initiative from the Germans, and then preventing Ludendorff from using logistical nodes supporting the German war effort with raw material and troop transportation. At this point, Foch had to leverage and coordinate with the Supreme War Council to ensure he had the means necessary to achieve his intended strategy. The Council continuously deliberated with ministerial organizations to prioritize shipping assets and engaged in heated political discourse to quickly incorporate American troops to the front. The political

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<sup>130</sup> John Kotter, *Power and Influence* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985), 44.

<sup>131</sup> FM 3-16, *The Army in Multinational Operations*, 1-2-1-3; Army Doctrinal Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-0, *Mission Command* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 2-1-2-2.

dialogue between Foch and the Supreme War Council allowed him to create a deliberate strategy that synchronized the reduction of the St. Mihiel salient and an attack into Flanders.

The Supreme War Council's development of strategic options in Russia and Macedonia could have removed troops available for Foch's great counter-offensive. This balance of resources provides an example of political influence on strategy and military operations. The Coalition developed an umbrella strategy and a broad outline where details could emerge within it.<sup>132</sup> They wanted to remove pressure from the front, and specifics emerged indicating where to intervene, the troops or shipping assets needed, and the political and strategic risk involved. While politicians deliberated the risk and reward for each of those options, they directly adjusted the resources available to Foch. By sending only limited troops to intervene in Russia and deciding not opening a Macedonia theater, Foch was able to accelerate his summer offensive.

When Prince Max of Baden began discussions with President Wilson in 1918, the influence of policy on war is overwhelmingly apparent. Two-levels of politics became entangled in the political pre-armistice deliberations within the Supreme War Council as indicated in the informal political meetings held outside of the council increased in October.<sup>133</sup> When potential for an end of the war to emerged, politicians wanted an outcome that would be acceptable domestically. Their contributions did not support the overall coalition desires armistice, notably in the French demands for an occupation of the Rhineland and the emphasis on disarmament rather than ceasing hostilities. Throughout the occupation, French demands for retribution alienated the views of other international agents of the coalition. By 1923, relations with the United States and Germany deteriorated, and American forces withdrew from the Rhineland.

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<sup>132</sup> Henry Mintzberg, *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 24-25.

<sup>133</sup> Robert Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (Summer 1988), 427, 434.

The lifecycle of the coalition between 1917 and 1923 shows the interactions of policy on military strategy and operational art and reinforces the fundamentals of multinational operations. It describes how boundaries of strategy are within the realm of both military and political leadership as seen in the interactions between the Supreme War Council and General Foch. General Foch managed his multi-national force through the legitimacy of his position, and by impartial and transparent decision-making. Over time domestic concerns influence the national interests and then shift international relations among the coalition. This interaction shapes the strategies that can support a coalition or fracture it as seen in both 1917 and 1923.

Complications inherent in coalition warfare have existed since the earliest records of history, and operational artists and strategists will continue to manage the complex interconnectedness of international politics and war. By examining the efforts of political leaders like Lloyd George, and Wilson, the actions of strategists like General Foch and Weygand, and how they affect operational artists like Generals Pershing and Haig, we can anticipate challenges when fighting as a coalition. In doing so, operational artists and strategists of the future can identify trends that may lead their organization to failure and use fundamentals of multi-national operations to promote success.

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